



The Growth of Non-Traditional Employment: Are Jobs Becoming More Precarious?

Staff
Research Paper

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Key points

- Much of the discussion about non-traditional employment in Australia has focused on the ABS measure of casual employees because:
 - it is one of the few regularly published measures of non-traditional employment;
 - it is often interpreted as an indicator of ‘precarious’ employment; and
 - it shows that the share of all employed persons who are casuals grew from 13 per cent in 1984 to 22 per cent in 1999.
- However, less than half the people classified as casual employees by the ABS in August 1998 were genuine employees (working in somebody else’s business) and worked in a way that was casual (in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term):
 - the ABS measure of casual employees was overstated by 34 per cent because it included people who were not genuine employees with a casual employment contract; and
 - at least one-third of all employees with a casual employment contract did not work in a way that was casual (occasional, irregular or short term).
- The problems with the casuals data illustrate the limitations of ABS labour statistics for the analysis of non-traditional employment: the types of employment identified are very broad; many owner managers are treated as employees; and the terminology can be confusing.
- The ABS has made a considerable effort to address some of the deficiencies with its labour statistics but it will continue to use the same employment definitions in its regular surveys (which are the only source of historical data on casuals).
- Many labour market analysts are aware of the limitations of ABS labour statistics but there has been a tendency to use the data regardless in statistical analyses. The limitations of such research need to be borne in mind, given the significant measurement problems identified.

1 Introduction

This paper investigates whether Australian labour statistics adequately capture the diverse characteristics of ‘non-traditional’ employment. The term non-traditional refers to any job which is not a full-time position in somebody else’s business with regular hours and an explicit contract for ongoing employment. This paper is intended to facilitate a more informed debate about the growing relative importance of non-traditional employment.

Much of the discussion about non-traditional employment in Australia has focused on the ABS measure of casual employees (defined as employees who are entitled to neither paid holiday nor sick leave). These data are widely used for three reasons. First, they are one of the few regularly published measures of non-traditional employment. Second, they are often interpreted as an indicator of ‘precarious’ employment because casuals are widely thought to be working in jobs that are casual in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term. Third, the share of all employed persons classified as casuals by the ABS has grown rapidly since the mid 1980s: from 13 per cent of all employed persons in 1984 to 22 per cent in 1999 (equivalent to an increase from 16 to 26 per cent of employees).

Many commentators have interpreted the growth of casuals as evidence that precarious employment has become more prevalent in Australia (see for example Burgess and Campbell 1998; Hall, Harley and Whitehouse 1998). Such concerns about non-traditional employment are reinforced by OECD (1996) research, which concluded that Australia has a higher share of workers in ‘temporary’ jobs than any other OECD country except Spain. The implication for policy makers seems to be that non-traditional jobs should be curtailed (Campbell 1996a; Romeyn 1992). However, the implicit assumption that such jobs are undesirable does not rest on firm foundations.

There are limited data on the characteristics of non-traditional jobs. What is apparent is that non-traditional employment is very diverse. Thus, it is probably important to have data which identify narrow (and hence relatively homogeneous) types of non-traditional employment. Unfortunately, the employment types normally identified in Australian labour statistics (including casuals) tend to be very broad (ABS 2000a).

An additional problem is that there is no commonly accepted definition of precarious employment in the labour economics literature. Nevertheless, two general approaches can be discerned (Burgess and Campbell 1998). The first approach treats particular types of non-traditional employment (such as casuals) as necessarily precarious. The second approach defines precariousness on a case-by-case basis by examining the characteristics of individual jobs. This recognises that precariousness is not solely a function of the type of employment contract and that there can be varying degrees of precariousness. However, there is no standard list of characteristics and associated weights that can be used to implement this approach.

We argue that jobs cannot be neatly categorised as either precarious or not precarious. All jobs are precarious to some degree. In this paper, we consider jobs in *relative* terms by comparing their characteristics, particularly where they impact on job security. Our main source of data is a new ABS survey published in February 2000. An important feature of this data source is that it addresses a number of measurement problems with the broad employment categories normally used for ABS labour statistics.

The next section of this paper details the problems with the definitions normally used by the ABS and considers how well these have been addressed in the newly published survey. An examination of how the industrial relations system treats casual employees is then presented. This is followed by an analysis of the new ABS data and a comparison of survey methods used in other countries. Possible reasons why non-traditional employment is growing are then discussed. Finally, concluding comments are made.

2 Definitions used for ABS labour statistics

The ABS does not regularly publish data that distinguish between the many different types of employment. A summary of available items is given in table 1 and the framework used to classify workers is illustrated in figure 1. The employment categories that are identified tend to be very broad. For example, the monthly *Labour Force* (cat. no. 6203.0) usually only distinguishes between full and part-time workers (based on total hours worked in *all* jobs). Additional detail is provided in the August and November editions of the *Labour Force*, which report the number of employees, employers, own account workers, and contributing family workers. The annual *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership* (cat. no. 6310.0) has data on full and part-time employees (based on hours worked in *main* job) as well as permanent and casual employees (based on leave entitlements).

Employees who are classified as being both permanent and working full-time in their main job are closest to the concept of traditional employment. Conversely, non-traditional employment includes own account workers, employers, casual employees, part-time workers, and employees who are not full-time permanents in their main job. On this basis, historical ABS data show that the relative significance of non-traditional employment has grown markedly. This is largely due to rapid growth of casual and part-time employees (these groups are not mutually exclusive). ABS data show that casualls accounted for almost half the growth in employed persons between 1984 and 1999. As a result, the share of all employed persons who were casualls increased from 13 per cent in 1984 to 22 per cent in 1999 (figure 2). The ABS data also show that most casualls work on a part-time basis (70 per cent in August 1999).

The lack of detail associated with the broad definitions normally used for ABS statistics has troubled labour market analysts for some time (see for example Burgess 1994). Of particular concern has been the inclusion of some owner managers in the category of employees. This occurs because owner managers of incorporated enterprises are technically employees of their own business. Many of these people are also categorised as casual employees because they do not give themselves paid holiday or sick leave. This is unfortunate because the circumstances of owner managers are likely to be very different from people who work as employees in someone else's business. An additional problem is that

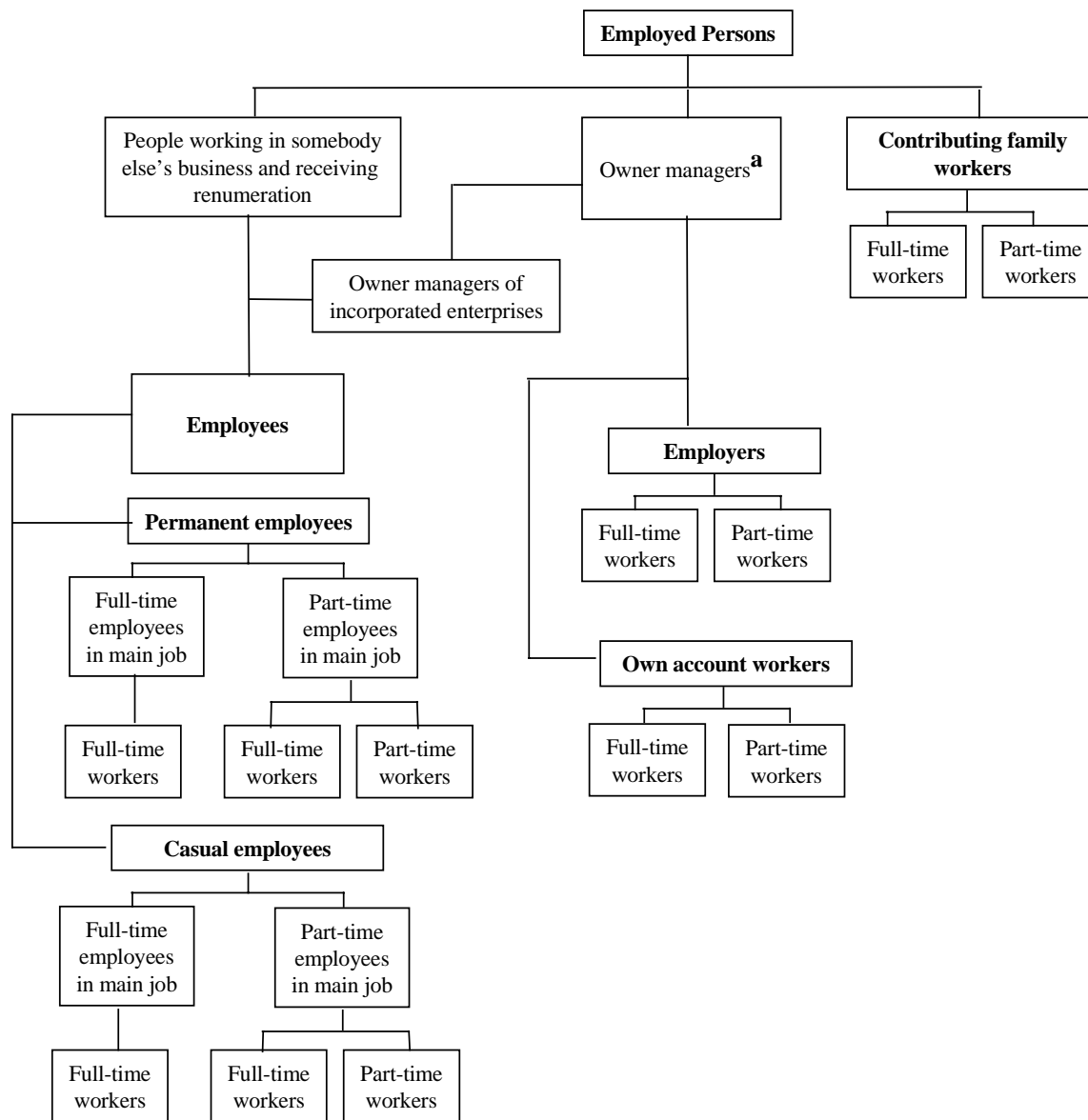
genuine employees (people working in somebody else's business) who are classified as casuals are a very heterogeneous group and so it is unclear whether their rapid growth is a cause for concern (Campbell 1996b).

Table 1 Employment types identified in regular ABS surveys

<i>Employment type</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Employer	A person who operates their own <u>unincorporated</u> enterprise or engages independently in a profession or trade, and <u>hires one or more employees</u> .
Own account worker	A person who operates their own <u>unincorporated</u> enterprise or engages independently in a profession or trade, and <u>hires no employees</u> .
Contributing family worker	Person who works without pay in an economic enterprise operated by a relative.
Employee	A person who either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • works for an employer and receives remuneration in wages, salary, a retainer fee by their employer while working on a commission basis, tips, piece-rates, or payment in kind; or • operates their own <u>incorporated</u> enterprise with or without hiring employees.
Permanent employee	An employee who is entitled to paid holiday <u>or</u> sick leave.
Casual employee	An employee who is entitled to <u>neither</u> paid holiday nor sick leave.
Part-time worker	Employed person who usually works less than 35 hours a week and did so in the survey reference week.
Part-time employee in main job	An employee for whom 'part-time' was the response to the question 'Is your main job full-time or part-time?' (main job is that in which most hours are usually worked).

Source: ABS (*Standards for Labour Force Statistics*, Cat. no. 1288.0; *Labour Force*, Cat no. 6203.0; *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership*, Cat. no. 6310.0).

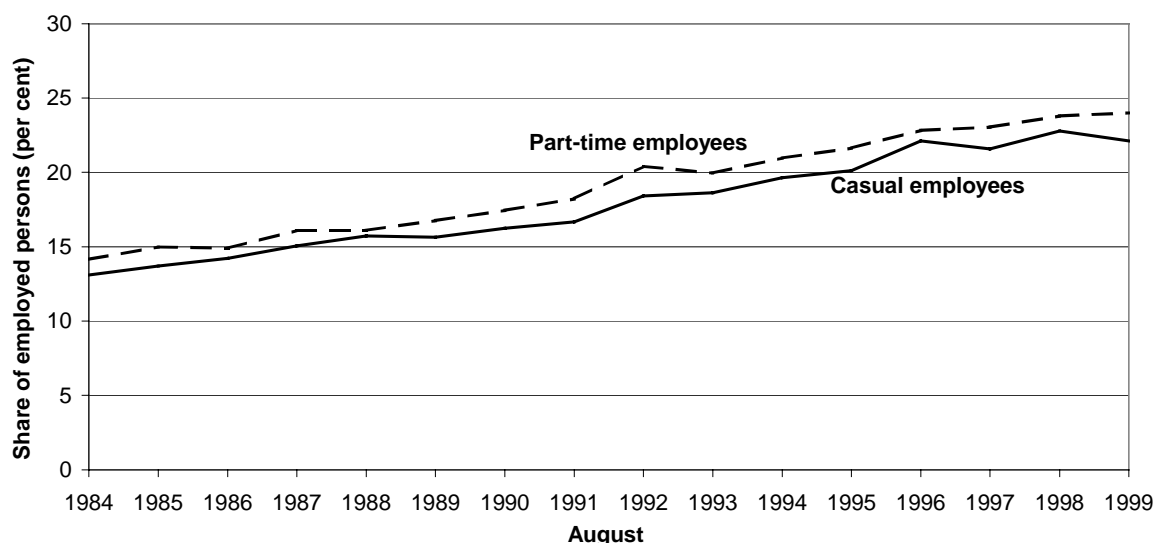
Figure 1 **Framework used to classify workers for regular ABS statistics**



^a Owner managers are people who work in their own enterprise.

Source: Productivity Commission.

Figure 2 **Relative importance of casual and part-time employees^a, 1984–99**



^a The categories of part-time and casual employees are not mutually exclusive. On average, 70 per cent of casuals worked part-time in their main job between 1984 and 1999.

Data source: Burgess and Campbell (1998) and ABS (*Labour Force*, Cat no. 6203.0; *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership*, Cat. no. 6310.0).

A new ABS approach

The ABS has recently developed two new surveys in response to concerns about the broad definitions it was using for labour statistics (Bode 2000). These are the *Forms of Employment Survey* (FOES) and the *Survey of Employment Arrangements and Superannuation* (SEAS). The first and only FOES collection to date was conducted in August 1998 as a supplement to the *Labour Force Survey*. The results were published in February 2000 as *Forms of Employment* (cat. no. 6359.0). One of the main objectives of the FOES was to collect data on some alternative forms of employment (Bode 2000). However, the sample was restricted to employed persons who worked for monetary reward. This is unlikely to be a major problem, given that Labour Force Survey data show that less than 1 per cent of employed persons in August 1998 were contributing family workers. The next FOES is scheduled for November 2001.

Field work for the first SEAS collection was only completed in June 2000 and so results are not yet available. It is a more comprehensive survey than the FOES but similar types of non-traditional employment are identified. One major advantage of the SEAS is that it includes data on up to two jobs for each employed person. The FOES data relate to the job in which people worked the most hours (referred to as their main job).

Five different forms of employment were measured in the FOES (table 2). Of particular note was the use of a new category of ‘self-identified casuals’ which excluded ‘owner managers of incorporated enterprises’. In addition, the terminology of permanent employees was dropped in favour of a revised category called ‘employees with leave entitlements’.

Table 2 Employment types used in the Forms of Employment Survey

<i>Employment type</i>	<i>Definition</i>
1. Employees with leave entitlements	Persons who (a) were entitled to receive both paid holiday and sick leave, and (b) worked in someone else’s business or worked in their own unincorporated business but did not invoice clients for own payment and paid PAYE tax.
2. Self-identified casuals	Persons who (a) were not entitled to receive both paid holiday and sick leave, (b) considered their job to be casual, and (c) worked in someone else’s business or reported that they worked in their own unincorporated business but paid PAYE tax and did not invoice clients for own payment.
3. Owner managers of unincorporated enterprises	Persons who operated their own unincorporated enterprise, including those engaged independently in a trade or profession.
4. Owner managers of incorporated enterprises	Persons who operated their own incorporated enterprise, including those who drew a wage or salary for their work in their own incorporated enterprise.
5. Other employed persons	Persons who (a) were not entitled to receive both paid holiday and sick leave, (b) did not consider their job to be casual, and (c) worked in someone else’s business or reported that they worked in their own unincorporated business but did not invoice clients for own payment and paid PAYE tax.

Source: ABS (Forms of Employment, Cat. no. 6359.0).

Another important feature of the FOES definitions is that the category of ‘owner managers of unincorporated enterprises’ excludes people who say they work in their own business but have characteristics more like employees. The criteria used to identify such de facto employees are that they do not invoice clients for own payment and pay PAYE tax. A possible weakness of this approach is that it does not capture de facto employees who, for the purpose of minimising tax, use the Prescribed Payments System (PPS) of taxation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this may be a particular problem in the building industry (Buchanan and Allan 1998). However, the ABS did ask additional questions in the FOES which enable the identification of owner managers who were not independent of their client.

One problem with the FOES definitions is how to interpret the category of ‘other employed persons’. It was essentially a residual group for people who did not fit

into the other categories. As a result, it contained a diverse range of workers, including some employees and owner managers of unincorporated enterprises.

The FOES definition of a self-identified casual has a less restrictive criteria for leave entitlements than the standard ABS measure of casuals, but has the additional requirement that workers consider themselves to be employed as a casual (see table 3 for a comparison of the definitions). The definition for self-identified casuals not only avoids the inclusion of owner managers but also recognises that some casuals are entitled to paid leave. However, it does not eliminate widespread confusion about the meaning of the term casual.

Table 3 Comparison of different ABS definitions of permanent and casual employees^a

<i>Employment type</i>	<i>Entitled to paid sick leave</i>	<i>Entitled to paid holiday leave</i>	<i>Employee considers job to be casual</i>
	✓	✓	not asked
Permanent employees	✗	✓	not asked
	✓	✗	not asked
Casual employees	✗	✗	not asked
	✗	✗	✓
Self-identified casual employees	✗	✓	✓
	✓	✗	✓

^a In August 1998, 0.6 per cent of all employees met the criteria for both permanent and self-identified casual employees because they had either paid holiday or sick leave (but not both).

Source: ABS (*Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership*, Cat. no. 6310.0; *Forms of Employment*, Cat. no. 6359.0).

Casual employees are widely thought to be working in jobs that are casual in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term. However, the ABS definition of casuals (and self-identified casuals) is not intended to measure such people. Rather, the objective is to identify employees who have a casual employment contract. As will be shown later in this paper, many of these people work regular hours and have a long-term employment relationship with their employer. While there are sound reasons for the ABS approach, it has the unfortunate consequence that the casual terminology is confusing for many users of ABS statistics. This includes the OECD (1996), which misinterpreted Australian data on casuals as measuring temporary employment. Given such confusion, it is useful to closely examine the ABS definitions of casuals.

A closer look at the definition of casuals

The standard ABS definition of a casual is an employee who is entitled to neither paid holiday nor sick leave. This is seen as a simple and objective method of identifying employees who have a casual employment contract as understood in Australia's industrial relations system. This system often excludes casual employees from benefits available to permanent employees, including paid holiday and sick leave. The rationale for these exclusions is that under common law, casuals are deemed to be employed on a new contract at every engagement, and so are unable to accrue the required continuous service with an employer (*Neil v Cameron 1977*).

While in theory the ABS seems to be using an appropriate method to identify employees with a casual employment contract, there are a number of practical problems. As noted previously, the ABS definition includes owner managers of incorporated enterprises because they are technically employees and often do not give themselves paid holiday and sick leave. In August 1998, such owner managers accounted for 14 per cent of people categorised as casual employees by the ABS (2000a). Thus, it could be argued that this is a significant source of measurement error. Unpublished ABS data indicate that this problem has increased over time (DEWRSB 2000).

Another serious problem is that a significant minority of people do not consider themselves to be employed as casuals despite satisfying the standard ABS criteria for casuals and not being owner managers. In August 1998, this group accounted for 10 per cent of people identified as casual employees by the ABS (2000a). A less significant problem is that some casuals receive paid leave (Brooks 1992). In August 1998, the ABS (2000a) found that 3 per cent of self-identified casuals had either paid holiday or sick leave.

The above mentioned problems could be reduced by using the definition for self-identified casuals. However, it is our understanding that the ABS will continue to use its standard measure of casuals in its regular publications.

Even if the self-identified casuals measure was used, it would not identify employees whose work is casual in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term. While casuals are excluded from leave entitlements on the common law basis that they are unable to accrue continuous service with an employer, the reality is different. ABS (2000a) data show that among self-identified casuals in August 1998, 38 per cent had no variation in their earnings from one month to the next (excluding overtime), 26 per cent had been working for the same employer for three or more years, and 74 per cent expected to be with their employer in 12 months time. Hence, there is a large group of 'permanent' casuals who appear to have an implicit contract for ongoing employment. To understand how this situation arises,

it is necessary to examine how the industrial relations system treats employees with a casual employment contract. This is done in the next section of this paper.

3 Would the true casual workers please stand up?

There is no precise definition of a casual employee that is widely accepted among industrial relations practitioners. Rather, decisions by the courts and industrial tribunals over many years have led to considerable ambiguity. The current situation is best described by using an often-quoted High Court case from the 1930s:

In Australian domestic law, the expressions ‘casual employee’ and ‘casual employment’ are expressions with no fixed meaning (McTierman J, *Doyle v Sydney Steel Ltd* 1936).

It could be argued that this was not always the case because the term casual was initially used in awards to identify a specific form of employment. In particular, people engaged as hourly or daily hire employees were seen as being casual by industrial tribunals because they were usually employed in cases where work was irregular, short term and of limited duration (*Federated Ship Painters and Dockers Union of Australia v Commonwealth Steamship Owners Association* 1918; *Re The Food Preservers Award* 1960, 99 CAR 340).

As casual work was seen as being irregular and short term, these workers were paid a higher hourly rate in the form of a casual loading. This was introduced so that the earnings of hourly and daily hire employees were comparable to the basic wage of weekly hire employees (Higgins 1922). The casual loading was also intended to limit the number of employees engaged as casals and to deter some employers from replacing ongoing employees with casals (*Burazin v Blacktown City Guardian Pty Ltd* 1995). More recently, the casual loading has been calculated to compensate for the loss of some entitlements associated with ongoing employment (Dawkins and Norris 1990; Brooks 1992).

The approach used by the courts and industrial tribunals in the early years of the twentieth century was based on the common law principle that casals do not have a continuous employment contract. Provisions in awards referring to casual employees were drafted with this common law principle in mind. However, they did not clearly define a casual or the type of work that casals would do. Casals were simply defined as employees ‘engaged as such’ or ‘engaged and paid as such’ (Creighton and Stewart 2000). This facilitated a divergence between the common law understanding and the actual circumstances of many casual employees. The

High Court recognised this situation in its landmark *Doyle v Sydney Steel Ltd 1936* decision, which identified two types of casual employees:

- irregular or ‘true’ casuals; and
- ‘permanent’ casuals employed on a regular and systematic basis where the true nature of employment is ongoing.

An important 1996 case (*Reed v Blue Line Cruises Ltd 1996*) endorsed these findings. True casuals were said to be characterised by ‘informality, irregularity and uncertainty’ whereas permanent casuals were viewed as having regular hours, income and an ongoing employment relationship (Creighton and Stewart 2000).

The practical effect of these developments is that casual employment contracts are not restricted to people who work in a way that is casual in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term. Furthermore, being employed on a casual contract does not necessarily imply that a job is far more precarious than one with an ongoing employment contract. This is most evident for legislative protection from unfair dismissal. People with casual employment contracts are typically excluded from such protection only if they have worked with their employer for a short period, or their work arrangements are irregular and they do not have an implicit contract for ongoing employment. This is because only true casuals are seen as meeting the common law understanding that each engagement is separate and so refusal to issue another contract is not a dismissal (*Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Ltd v Taylor 1994*).

The recent *Graham v Bluesuits Pty Ltd t/as Toongabbie Hotel 1999* decision implicitly confirmed this situation in the federal jurisdiction. The Full Bench of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission found that casual contract employees are entitled to the same protection from unfair dismissal as ongoing employees, provided they are employed for at least 12 months with the employer, work regular hours, and have an expectation of ongoing employment. The application of unfair dismissal protection to long term casuals also occurs in other jurisdictions, although the minimum required duration of employment varies. For example, South Australia and New South Wales only require six months.

Casuals can also receive many of the benefits associated with ongoing employment. For example, the *Queensland Industrial Relations Act 1999* provides long service and parental leave to casuals with more than two years of service because they are seen as having an ongoing relationship with their employer. Similar arrangements exist in other jurisdictions but not to the same extent. In South Australia, casual employees have been deemed eligible under certain circumstances for long service leave (*Stewart v Port Noarlunga Hotel Ltd 1981*). The New South Wales *Long*

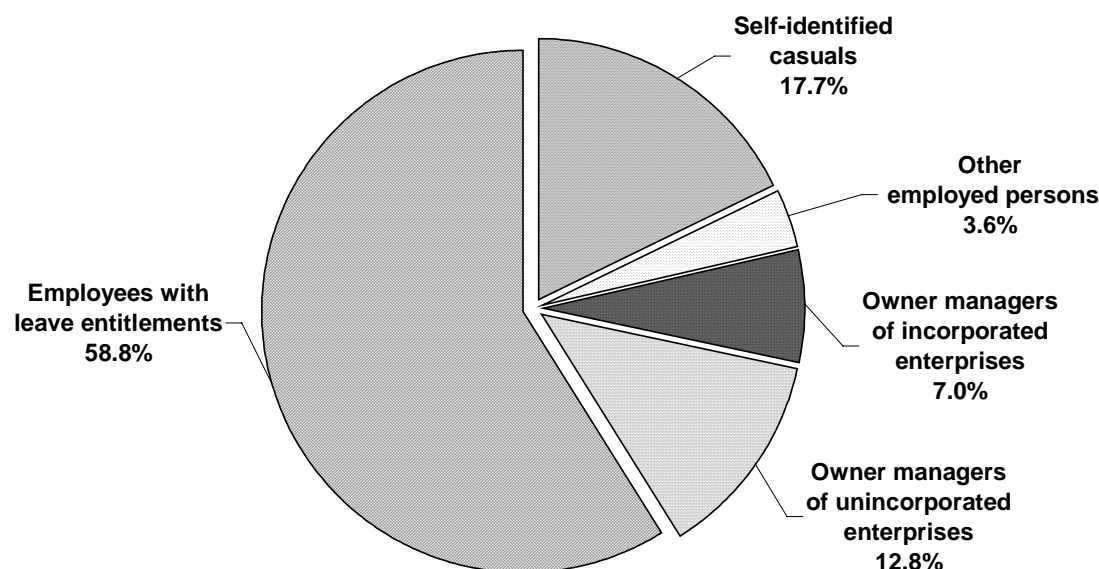
Service Leave Act 1955 (NSW) was amended in 1985 to provide for a form of continuous service for casual employees.

In summary, being employed on a casual employment contract does not imply that a person's work is casual in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term. Furthermore, casual employees who can prove a long term ongoing employment relationship with their employer are no more precarious with respect to unfair dismissal than so-called permanent employees. Thus, the circumstances of casual employees who have an ongoing relationship with their employer can be difficult to distinguish from so-called permanent employees. This raises the question of how many people categorised as casuals by the ABS are true casuals (work is occasional, irregular or short term). The next section addresses this issue by analysing the new FOES data.

4 What do the new Australian data tell us?

According to the FOES data, the majority of employed persons in August 1998 were employees with leave entitlements in their main job (figure 3). The share of these jobs that were part-time (and hence non-traditional) is unknown because such data were not collected (part-time status was determined on the basis of hours worked in all jobs). Self-identified casuals were the next largest group, accounting for 17.7 per cent of employed persons who worked for monetary reward (23.2 per cent of employed persons who worked for monetary reward met the standard ABS definition of casuals). The only other employment type accounting for more than 10.0 per cent of employed persons was owner managers of unincorporated enterprises.

Figure 3 **Distribution of employed persons^a among employment types^b, August 1998**



^a Excluding employed persons who did not work for monetary reward. ^b People are categorised on the basis of their main job (that in which most hours are usually worked).

Data source: ABS (*Forms of Employment*, Cat. no. 6359.0).

Table 4 compares the distribution of employed persons between the FOES employment categories with how people would have been allocated using the standard ABS definitions. Among employed persons who worked for monetary reward, 6.4 per cent would have been classified as employees using the standard definitions despite being owner managers of incorporated enterprises. More than half of these people (3.3 per cent of employed persons who worked for monetary reward) would have been assigned to the subcategory of casual employees because they did not give themselves paid holiday and sick leave.

Table 4 Comparison of employment types used in the Labour Force Survey and the Forms of Employment Survey, August 1998
(Share of employed persons^a)

	<i>FOES definitions</i>					<i>Total employed persons</i>
	<i>Employees with leave entitlements</i>	<i>Self-identified casuals</i>	<i>Owner managers of incorporated enterprises</i>	<i>Owner managers of unincorporated enterprises</i>	<i>Other employed persons</i>	
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Standard ABS definitions						
Employees	58.7	17.6	6.4	0.6	3.1	86.4
Permanent	58.7	0.5	3.1	0.1	0.7	63.1
Casual	0.0	17.1	3.3	0.3	2.4	23.2
Not determined	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Employers	0.1	0.0	0.5	3.3	0.1	4.0
Own account workers	0.0	0.1	0.1	9.0	0.3	9.5
Total employed persons	58.8	17.7	7.0	12.8	3.6	100.0

^a Excluding employed persons who did not work for monetary reward.

Data source: ABS (*Forms of Employment*, Cat. no. 6359.0).

The number of self-identified casuals (1.487 million) was 24 per cent lower than the number of people who met the standard ABS criteria for casual employees (1.946 million). Table 5 shows that this difference was largely due to the standard ABS measure of casuals including owner managers of incorporated enterprises (0.280 million) and employees who did not consider themselves to be employed as casuals (0.200 million). Use of the standard ABS definitions would have also led to a small proportion of people with casual employment contracts being misclassified as permanent employees (0.041 million), employers (0.001 million), and own account workers (0.005 million).

The bottom of table 5 presents a rough estimate of how many people with casual employment contracts actually worked in a way that was casual (in the sense of

being occasional, irregular or short term). The calculation was made by subtracting the number of self-identified casuals who had no variation in their earnings and did not expect to leave their employer in the following 12 months for work-related reasons. Of the people categorised as casual employees (23.2 per cent of employed persons who worked for monetary reward), we estimate that less than half (11.3 per cent of employed persons who worked for monetary reward) were genuine employees (people working in somebody else's business) and worked in a way that was casual. This also implies that less than two-thirds of self-identified casuals worked in a way that was casual.

Table 5 Decomposition of ABS measures of casual employees, August 1998

		<i>Number</i>	<i>Share of employed persons^a</i>
		million	per cent
Standard ABS measure of casual employees		1.946	23.2
<i>less</i>	Owner managers misclassified as casuals: Incorporated enterprises	0.280	3.3
	Unincorporated enterprises	0.027	0.3
	Employees who do not see themselves as being employed as casuals	0.200	2.4
<i>plus</i>	People misclassified as: Permanent employees	0.041	0.5
	Employers	0.001	0.0
	Own account workers	0.005	0.1
<i>equals</i>	Self-identified casuals	1.487	17.7
<i>less</i>	Self-identified casuals whose earnings do not vary <u>and</u> have an implicit contract for ongoing employment ^b	0.539	6.4
<i>equals</i>	Self-identified casuals whose earnings vary or do not have an implicit contract for ongoing employment	0.948	11.3

^a Excludes employed persons who did not work for monetary reward. ^b People are treated as having an implicit contract for ongoing employment if they either expect their fixed-term contract to be renewed or do not expect to leave their employer in the following 12 months for work related reasons.

Data source: ABS (*Forms of Employment*, Cat. no. 6359.0 and unpublished data).

Our conclusion that the ABS measure of casual employees (and self-identified casuals) overstates the number of employees whose work is casual is supported by the results of two non-ABS surveys. First of these is a large postal survey of employers conducted in May 1995 and reported by Brosnan and Walsh (1998). The sample was drawn from the ABS Business Register and weighted by industry and workplace size so as to represent the population of all employees. Survey

respondents were instructed to categorise employees hired on a periodic basis as need arises as ‘occasional’ workers, and those hired for relatively short periods as ‘temporary’ workers. Only 9.9 per cent of employees were categorised as occasional and 2.4 per cent were classified as temporary. Thus, the share of employees whose work was occasional, irregular or short term was 12.3 per cent. In contrast, the ABS found that 24.0 per cent of employees met its standard definition of casuals in August 1995.

The second point of comparison is the employee component of the 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS). This used the standard ABS definitions but found that only 10 per cent of employees were casuals (Morehead et al. 1997). The equivalent ABS estimate (restricted to workplaces of 20 or more people) was 16 per cent in August 1995. This discrepancy could be due to differences in survey methods. The ABS used face to face interviews, whereas respondents to the AWIRS employee survey completed questionnaires on their own. This may have caused many permanent casuals to exclude themselves from the casual category in AWIRS because they did not work in a way that was casual.

Precariousness

To get some indication of the share of all employed persons who worked for monetary reward (not just casuals) whose jobs are among the more precarious, we looked at the four groups which are defined in table 6 (note that these groups are not mutually exclusive). The criteria used were based on the fact that unfair dismissal legislation applies to most employees (other than those on fixed-term contracts) who work on a regular and systematic basis with the same employer for at least 12 months. The exact magnitudes of the estimates in table 6 are debatable because one could make changes to the criteria used in each case. However, it is unlikely that this would change the general conclusion that the order of magnitude is smaller than the often quoted quarter of employees who are classified as casuals by the ABS.

Table 6 Approximate indicators of precariousness, August 1998

<i>Type of precariousness</i>	<i>Approximate indicator</i>	<i>Share of employed persons^a</i>
		per cent
Job can be terminated with little or no prior notice by the employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-identified casuals whose tenure is less than 12 months; plus • Self-identified casuals whose tenure is at least 12 months and whose earnings vary from one month to the next (excluding overtime). 	14
Hours, earnings or functions of the job can be changed at will by the employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-identified casuals whose earnings vary from one month to the next (excluding overtime) and would prefer to work more or less hours. 	6
No explicit or implicit contract for ongoing employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People employed on a fixed-term contract that is not expected to be renewed; plus • People not employed on a fixed-term contract who do not expect to be with their current employer or business in 12 months time due to work related reasons. 	3
No legislative protection from unfair dismissal after completing a probationary period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People employed on a fixed-term contract; plus • Self-identified casuals not employed on a fixed-term contract whose tenure is at least 12 months and whose earnings vary from one month to the next (excluding overtime); plus • Self-identified casuals not employed on a fixed-term contract whose tenure is less than 12 months. 	17

^a Excludes employed persons who did not work for monetary reward.

Data source: ABS (*Forms of Employment*, Cat. no. 6359.0 and unpublished data).

5 International comparison of survey methods

Australia is not the only country to experience an apparent decline in the relative significance of ongoing full-time employees (Bentolila and Dolado 1993; Brosnan and Walsh 1998; De Grip et al. 1997; Delsen 1995; Lee 1996). Hence, data on non-traditional employment have also been of interest in other countries. This section compares the approaches used to collect such data in the United States, Canada, and the European Union (EU). The guidelines adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) are also examined. It is found that forms of employment are not identified on the basis of leave entitlements, in contrast to the ABS definition of casuals.

United States

The primary source of US data on non-traditional workers is collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in its Contingent Worker and Alternative Employment supplement to the Current Population Survey (Hipple, S., BLS, Washington DC, pers. comm., 31 March 2000). This has been conducted every two years since February 1995. Its main goals are to collect data on alternative work arrangements and jobs that are structured to be of limited duration (BLS 2000b). All employed persons except unpaid family workers are included in the survey and data are collected for the job in which each individual works the most hours.

Contingent workers are defined by the BLS as those who do not perceive themselves as having an explicit or implicit contract for ongoing employment (BLS 2000b). This is similar to the common law understanding of casual employees in Australia. Note, however, that contingent work is not associated with particular forms of employment and that alternative employment arrangements are not necessarily contingent. Indeed, most US contingent workers are employed in a regularly scheduled job that does not involve an intermediary (BLS 2000a; Cohany 1996, 1998).

An alternative work arrangement is defined by the BLS as employment that is arranged through an intermediary (such as a temporary help firm) or for which the place, time and quantity of work are potentially unpredictable (Polivka 1996).

Neither temporary nor part-time workers hired directly by an employer are considered to have alternative work arrangements. Data on four alternative forms of employment are identified by the BLS (table 7). On-call workers who are also contingent are probably closest to the concept of work that is of a casual nature, since their job is occasional, irregular and potentially short term.

**Table 7 Alternative employment arrangements measured in the BLS
Contingent Worker and Alternative Employment supplement**

<i>Employment type</i>	<i>Description</i>
On-call worker	Reports to work only when they are asked to do so. They can be scheduled to work for several days or weeks in a row.
Independent contractor	Someone who obtains customers on their own to provide a product or service.
Temporary help agency worker	Paid by a temporary help agency.
Contract company employee	Works for a company that contracts out them or their services. Not usually assigned to more than one customer. Usually works at the customer's worksite.

Source: Cohany (1996).

The key criteria used by the BLS (2000b) to identify whether a job is contingent is that the worker considers it to be temporary or does not expect it to continue as long as they wish. For jobs meeting this requirement, the BLS has developed three alternative measures of contingent employment. These are as follows, ranked from the narrowest to the broadest definition:

1. wage and salary earners who have worked for their current employer for one year or less and expect to work in their current job for one year or less;
2. workers (including self-employed and independent contractors) who expect their employment to last for no more than one year and have worked in their current job (or been self-employed) for one year or less; and
3. as for definition number 2, but without the one year requirement on expected duration and current tenure for wage and salary earners.

The rationale for the first two definitions is that holding a job for one year or more and expecting to continue holding it for another year or more is evidence of at least an implicit contract for ongoing employment (Polivka 1996). The final definition broadens the coverage to all wage and salary earners who do not expect their job to last. For temporary help and contract workers, contingency is based on the expected duration and tenure of their employment with the temporary help or contract firm, rather than the client to which they are assigned.

Canada

Statistics Canada (1999) collects data on forms of employment in a number of surveys. Most notably, the monthly Labour Force Survey identifies whether employees are working in a permanent or temporary job. A job is deemed to be temporary if it has a pre-determined end date or will end as soon as a specified project is completed (Statistics Canada 2000a). Temporary jobs are subdivided into four groups (table 8). One of these groups is 'on-call or casual job', which is defined on the basis of whether the work is occasional and irregular.

Table 8 Non-permanent job descriptions used by interviewers for the Canadian Labour Force Survey

<i>Employment type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Seasonal job	Works in an industry where employment levels rise and fall with the seasons.
Temporary, term or contract job	There was a definite indication from the employer before the job was accepted that the job will terminate at a specified point in time, or at the end of a particular task or project.
On-call or casual job	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work hours vary substantially from one week to the next.• Called to work by the employer when the need arises, not on a pre-arranged schedule.• Does not usually get paid for time not worked, and there is no indication from the employer that they will be called to work on a regular, long-standing basis.
Work done through a temporary help agency	A temporary help agency arranged for the job and the person is paid by this agency.

Source: M. Levesque (Statistics Canada, Ottawa, pers. comm., 23 March 2000).

A supplement to Canada's Labour Force Survey, called the Survey of Work Arrangements, collects information on 'non-typical' work arrangements, such as on-call and home based work and multiple job holding. Data are also collected on the reasons for these arrangements, the weekly and daily work schedules of employees, and reasons for self-employment. To date, this supplementary survey has been conducted in 1991 and 1995. Statistics Canada also collects data on forms of employment in its annual Workplace and Employee Survey. The employee component of this survey asks people which of the following best describes their terms of employment:

- regular employee with no contractual or anticipated termination date;
- seasonal employee (job is intermittent according to season of the year);
- term employee (employment ends at a specified date); or

-
- casual or on-call employee.

Employees are instructed that casual or on-call employees are persons:

- who may have hours of work that vary substantially from one week to the next; and
- who are called to work as the need arises, not on a pre-arranged schedule.

(Statistics Canada 2000b, question 15, p.10)

Thus, casuals are again defined as being occasional and irregular. In separate questions, employees are also asked about how far in advance they know about their weekly hours of work and whether they usually work the same hours of the day and same days of the week.

European Union

The EU requires its member states to conduct a labour force survey each year (Eurostat 1999). Council Regulation no. 577/98 states that the data should include the following characteristics for each respondent's main job:

- permanency of the job (and reasons);
- duration of temporary job or work contract of limited duration;
- full/part-time status (and reasons); and
- home based work.

The Eurostat (1999) guidelines state that full/part-time status should be determined on the basis of a spontaneous answer given by the respondent. This can be checked against data collected on hours usually worked to detect implausible answers. The guidelines for collecting data on permanency of employment state that:

A job may be regarded as temporary if it is understood by both employer and the employee that the termination of the job is determined by objective conditions such as reaching a certain date, completion of an assignment or return of another employee who has been temporarily replaced (Eurostat 1999).

Included in the temporary employment category are persons:

- employed in a seasonal job;
- engaged by a labour hire agency for a limited duration; or
- with a training contract of finite duration.

A practical example of the EU approach is the quarterly Labour Force Survey conducted by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS 1999). This collects data on temporary and permanent jobs, self-employed workers, full/part-time status, and home based work. Employees are classified as being temporary if they report that

their main job is non-permanent in one of the following ways: fixed period contract; agency temping; casual work; seasonal work; or other temporary work (Ojejimi, A., ONS, London, pers. comm., 6 April 2000). This is based on a self-assessment by those being surveyed (Smith, A., ONS, London, pers. comm., 20 April 2000). Hence, a definition of casual employment is not used to guide respondents.

International Labour Organisation

In January 1993, the ILO sponsored International Conference of Labour Statisticians made a Resolution Concerning the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93). The broad classifications specified in ICSE-93 are the basis for the forms of employment identified by the ABS (2000a) in its regular Labour Force Survey (employees, employers, own account workers, and contributing family workers). However, the ABS does not follow Section IV of the Resolution, which outlines the possible statistical treatment of people in precarious employment. Such people are defined in ICSE-93 as either:

- (a) workers whose contract of employment leads to the classification of the incumbent as belonging to the groups of casual workers, short-term workers or seasonal workers; or
- (b) workers whose contract of employment will allow the employing enterprise or person to terminate the contract at short notice and/or at will, the specific circumstances to be determined by national legislation and custom.

Casual workers are defined as having an explicit or implicit contract of employment which is not expected to continue for more than a short period, whose duration is to be determined by national circumstances. Thus, the ILO defines casuals on the basis that their work is short term, whereas the ABS includes people who have worked for their employer for many years and expect to continue to do so.

6 Causes of non-traditional employment growth

The growth of non-traditional employment in Australia has been examined in a number of studies. Many potential causes have been investigated using various data sources but the results tend to be less than conclusive. Nevertheless, it is apparent that different types of non-traditional employment are not growing for the same reasons (Wooden 1998). Thus, it is important to differentiate between the various forms of employment. Unfortunately, many studies treat the broad employment categories used for ABS labour statistics (especially casual employees) as being relatively homogenous (Campbell 1997; Burgess and Campbell 1998; Hall and Harley 2000; Hall and Harley and Whitehouse 1998).

Possible reasons for the growth of non-traditional employment which are mentioned in past research can be grouped into three broad categories: demand, supply and institutional factors. Supply related reasons include an increase in the share of young people who are students (and thus prefer jobs with flexible working hours) and higher labour force participation by married women (Gaston and Timcke 1999; Wooden and Hawke 1998; Burgess 1996; Brosnan and Thornwaite 1994). Demand based reasons tend to focus on the desire of employers for a more flexible workforce in response to changing product market conditions. Institutional factors include changes in regulatory arrangements. In practice, it can be difficult to separately identify the effects of each of these three categories.

Past quantitative research suggests that demand side factors have been more important than supply side issues in explaining the growth of casuals (Simpson 1994; Simpson, Dawkins and Madden 1997; Wooden and Hawke 1998). An important consideration on the demand side is that employers face a cost trade-off between using casual and ongoing employees (Dawkins and Norris 1990). However, they are not perfect substitutes and so wages and on-costs are unlikely to be the sole consideration. Casuals would be more attractive to employers where recruitment and training costs are low; demand is irregular; output cannot be stored; and where the cost of a poor match between employee and employer is high (Dawkins and Norris 1990; Deery and Mahony 1994; Burgess 1996).

Precisely quantifying the impact of the many potential reasons for the growth of casuals is difficult because results are sensitive to the data used, model

specification, and time period analysed. Using AWIRS data, Wooden (1998) identified four main reasons for the growth of casuals:

- a shift in economic activity to industries that use casuals relatively intensively;
- declining unionisation rates;
- privatisation; and
- an increased propensity for new firms to hire casuals rather than ongoing employees.

Other researchers have found that an increased propensity to use casuals in all industries has also been important (Dawkins and Norris 1990; Simpson, Dawkins and Madden 1997). Some have argued that changes to the regulatory system are the primary cause of the rapid growth of casuals (Brosnan and Thornwaite 1994; Campbell 1996b; Burgess and Campbell 1998). However, none of these researchers have presented robust quantitative evidence to support their argument.

Research on the growth of part-time employment is less extensive and tends not to distinguish between casual part-time and permanent part-time employment (Burgess 1997; Dawkins 1996; Mylett 1994). Supply side factors are often mentioned as one source of the growth of part-time employment. For example, increased participation of married women in the workforce and their preference for this type of employment has been well documented (Dawkins 1996; Burgess 1997; Wooden 1996). The growth of permanent part-time jobs has been linked to institutional changes in awards designed to enable flexibility for employers (through flexible rostering) and employees (to meet family care demands) (Junor 1998; Healy 2000).

Reasons for the growth of other forms of non-traditional employment are difficult to identify, partly because they account for only a small share of employed persons and limited data exist. The apparent increase in fixed-term contracts could be explained by demand side factors because firms want to establish a more flexible workforce (Hall and Harley 2000). While ABS (1997) data show that employers and own account workers have grown at a similar rate to all employed persons, there has been a relatively rapid increase in owner managers of incorporated enterprises (albeit from a very low base). Supply side factors (such as people wanting greater autonomy) could explain this growth, but there have been substantial problems in determining the extent and working conditions of these people (Vandenheuvel and Wooden 1995).

7 Concluding comments

Much of the debate about non-traditional employment has focused on the so-called ‘casualisation’ of the workforce and the implication that jobs are becoming more precarious. The foundation of this debate has been the rapid growth of casual employees as measured by the ABS. However, we showed that there are two significant problems with the ABS data which raise doubts about the casualisation thesis.

First, historical ABS data on casual employees include a large number of people who are not genuine employees (people working in somebody else’s business) with a casual employment contract. Inclusion of these workers caused the standard ABS measure of casual employees to be overstated by 34 per cent in August 1998. Second, the casuals data include many people whose work is not casual in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term. Overall, we estimate that less than half the people classified as casual employees by the ABS in August 1998 actually worked in a way that was casual and were genuine employees.

The problems with the casuals data illustrate the limitations of ABS labour statistics for the analysis of non-traditional employment. This is largely due to the broad employment categories used and the treatment of some owner managers as employees. The ABS has made a considerable effort to address some of these deficiencies in two new surveys: the *Forms of Employment Survey* (FOES) and the *Survey of Employment Arrangements and Superannuation* (SEAS). However, these surveys are only conducted on an irregular basis. It is our understanding that the regular *Labour Force Survey* (which is the only source of historical data on casuals) will continue to use the same employment definitions as previously.

Our comparison of collection methods used by foreign statistical agencies shows that the ABS could measure employees whose work is casual in the sense of being occasional, irregular or short term. Indeed, the ABS (2000b) has already taken a small step in this direction by testing a new questionnaire for its *Labour Force Survey*. This could provide a regular measure of short term employment.

Aside from measurement issues, there is a concern about confusing terminology. Many users of ABS statistics find the term casual employees (and probably self-identified casuals) unsatisfactory because what the ABS seeks to measure (employees with a casual employment contract) is very different from common

usage of the term casual. In addition, the category of permanent employees implies that such people have secure and long term jobs, which is misleading. A possible solution is to amend the terminology to ‘employees with a casual employment contract’ and ‘employees with an ongoing employment contract’.

In conclusion, many labour market analysts are aware of the data limitations we have raised. Nevertheless, there has been a tendency to use the data regardless in statistical analyses. The value of such research is questionable, given the significant measurement problems we identified. Research using (superior) US data highlights the danger in making generalisations about non-traditional employment, including its precariousness and whether people work in such jobs involuntarily (BLS 2000a, 2000b; Cohany 1996, 1998; Polivka 1996). Fortunately, the recent (or imminent) release of new Australian data from the FOES and SEAS collections using their improved employment categorisations provides an opportunity to undertake future research on a sounder foundation.

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